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ABSTRACT

A brief questionnaire examining how teachers' rules of conduct facilitate learning was answered by 20 teachers in a Northeastern urban elementary school. Only two of these, from the upper levels, posted written rules. Verbal rules regarding inappropriate talking and seat leaving behavior were most frequently issued across all grades. Also issued but at a lesser frequency were rules emphasizing courteousness in the hope it would generalize to other situations. Specific techniques for dealing with problem behaviors were offered by half the teachers. A literature search of this area found that most psychological work focused on behavior modification, while much educational material examined teacher characteristics plus teaching styles. Both the literature and responses to the questionnaire indicate that behavior modification is of little value in dealing with discipline problems. It is more effective to state rules of conduct clearly at the outset and enforce them consistently. (KH)

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QUESTIONING URBAN ELEMENTARY PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS ON CLASSROOM CONTROL RULES

by

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Irvington, NJ, Public Schools

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The work of the behavioral scientist might well become methodologically sounder if only he did not try so hard to be scientific.

Abraham Kaplan (1964, p. 406)

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ABSTRACT

All general education classroom teachers in one Northeastern urban public elementary school were requested to fill-in a brief questionnaire on classroom control rules. Twenty of twenty five did. Only two (from the upper levels) posted written rules within their classrooms. Verbal rules regarding inappropriate talking and seat leaving behavior were the most frequently issued across all grades. Getting younger students to auditorily attend and older ones to refrain from gum chewing and eating were also quite problematic. Also issued but at a lesser frequency were rules emphasizing courteousness ("The Golden Rule") in the hope it would generalize to other situations. Specific techniques for dealing with problem behaviors were offered by half the teachers to the open-ended question. Literature search of this area found most psychological work focusing on behavior modification while much educational material examined teacher characteristics plus teaching styles and the efficacy of these studies in regards to practical classroom control is questioned by this present study. Specific, concrete techniques suggested to teachers are felt to be most helpful as is making students very aware of classroom rules. Controlled experimental studies are advised to test these hypotheses.

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INTRODUCTION, PURPOSE, AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

A public school is generally thought of as a place where children are a great deal of their lives (a custodial function) and where learning takes place. The public school is also viewed as an institution where training and socialization are to occur. Regardless of one's philosophy as to what the mission of the public school should be, most everyone would agree that students must internalize a set of rules to accomplish school aims.

This research is considered a small scale survey of an exploratory nature (Golden, 1976) in a controlled milieu. Controlled mainly, however, as Dewey referred to a school as a laboratory. The major purpose of this study is to examine rules of conduct issued by classroom teachers to facilitate learning to accomplish school aims: "pure" academics, vocational training, or specific social skills. At this point some operational definitions should be provided to further clarify the intent of this work. A "rule of conduct" or "classroom management rule" is a rule to help accomplish the school goals but are differentiated from directions for lessons. An example of a rule of this sort would be: 'No one is to leave the room without permission.' For a rule to have

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been "issued" the teacher communicated it at one time either verbally or in writing. "Elementary school teachers" are those who teach Kindergarten through eighth grade. An "urban" setting is here considered a place where municipal population is of high density and the students come predominantly from "Working Class" or welfare supported homes. Also, since urban students are generally considered more difficult to educate because of their low sociceconomic status backgrounds (Boocock, 1980), if certain rules or methods can be found that are useful they should be even more effective with other student populations. "Useful" means facilitating one of the three types of learning previously discussed. Finally, the overall target population for this study is to be found in the regular classroom (mainstream or general education as opposed to special education or classes for the handicapped).

This author subscribes to the belief that mutual expectations are the nexus of society at large and that rules are the codified manifestation of these expectancies (Rose and Rose, 1969). Children, who have not yet incorporated a sophisticated code of conduct, initially need and want to be given structure (Anna Freud, 1965). Also, from a leading behavioral psychologist who was addressing parents:

> Clear rules for behaving make day-to-day living easier. Children should be taught the rules for living comfortably with others - how to be helpful, cooperative, responsible, clean, healthy, and so forth. By spelling out these for

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> their children, parents are in a position to know when to reinforce, when to ignore, or when to punish their children. Rules provide guides for parents in being consistent in training their children. Rules also help the child remember what is expected of him, since many actions are summarized in the rule (Becker, 1971, p. 148).

Finally and more specifically related to education, below is Woodring's (1953, p. 136) description of the kind of discipline which he felt - as this writer also does but remembering that it is rather idealized - to be an essential part of education.

> A properly disciplined classroom is one in which the rules are reasonable and in which they are so well accepted by the children that violations are comparatively rare. It is not one in which violations frequently occur and are severely punished....The rules appropriate to a classroom are the rules of normal civilized behavior of individuals in a social setting. They involve courtesy and a consideration for others.

This passage from Woodring invites the question: How is it possible to create such a climate within a classroom? This paper makes a humble attempt to examine it.

RELATED RESEARCH

It was surprising upon extensively searching the literature to discover that recent studies have not dealt much with an area that seems of such significance: classroom rules with normal students. Perhaps this is an age of denying authoritarianism in our society. Maybe the topic has just been overlooked because the obvious, even if of importance, is

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sometimes not seen. Or, the topic may have been considered but was considered too difficult to study "scientifically" or just not important enough by those who did. In any event, the related professional literature travels a forked road. Educators in the past have taken the path of focusing primarily upon the characteristics plus styles of the teacher and suggest that a master teacher should be emulated. The other lane journeyed found psychologists having dealt mainly with changing specific problem behaviors.

Psychological Studies

Most of the work published recently in psychology (especially in the journals) pertaining to classroom management has been dealt with from a behavioristic approach and is usually subsumed under the broad heading of behavior modification. This work is of mainly two types. The first deals with the singular or few students in the classroom who do not conform to classroom expectations and are seen as deviant and/or disturbing. There are numerous articles throughout the literature where usually the school psychologist will consult with the teacher to modify the deviant student's behavior (Hall, Panyan, Rabon, and Broden, 1968; O'Leary and O'Leary, 1976; Presland, 1973). This is done by manipulating "reinforcements" which are mostly rewards, utilizing "time-out" procedures which entails the student being separated from the group,

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or some other behavioral method under the philosophy - often unbeknownst to the school psychologist - that there are universal laws of behavior discovered with animals in the laboratory, mainly pigeons and rats, that carry over to humans. A further discussion of this lies outside this paper. The second major psychological approach merely provides the classroom teacher with information in how to apply behavior modification principles to the whole classroom (Becker, Thomas, and Carnine, 1969; Rollins, McCandless, Boyd, Thompson, and Brassell, 1974).

Educational Studies

Anderson's (1943) research was typical of those that looked at teaching style, comparing the efficacy of the lecture to the discussion, the former being determined better for the immediacy of learning information while the latter was said to yield better long-term retention. It was assumed that proper teaching techniques would preclude problem behavior. Ryans' (1960) classic study centered exclusively upon characteristics of "effective" teachers. The effective instructors were said to be better with or have greater amounts of nine various categories: genuine in appraisals of others, literacy, interest in the arts, participation in school groups, high perception of self-ambition, enjoyment of student relationships, preference for non-directive classroom procedures, verbal intelligence, and better emotional adjustment. These two are typical of the genre, some of which are still being published.

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A computer search of ERIC (an index of educational research) revealed only one article specifically dealing with classroom rules (Buckley and Cooper, 1978) and another with guides for improving student behavior (Di Giulio, 1978). "Classroom Management: A Rule Establishment and Enforcement Model" describes a model for effective classroom management consisting of two major parts: teacher behaviors related to rule establishment and teacher behaviors related to rule enforcement. "The 'Guaranteed' Behavior Improvement Plan" suggests that there is no single rule that assures appropriate classroom behavior, yet, to control the class, a teacher must control oneself. The "Plan" gives 13 tenets for helping elementary teachers maintain a controlled classroom and 12 guides for improving student behavior.

[The ERIC computer search located one other publication regarding rules (Sieber, 1979), but it is basically concerned with bureaucratic socialization in schools rather than classroom rules.]

METHOD

The Questionnaire

A brief questionnaire (see Appendix A) was designed to try to attain a high response rate and also to gather the most relevant data possible. It deliberately begins with three yes-or-no type questions; then seeks a longer response in terms of listing three classroom rules;

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and finally, a vague, open-ended question to gain original information that might have been overlooked otherwise.

Participants

The participants offered the questionnaire (as opposed to "respondents", those who actually returned the questionnaire) were all the regular Kindergarten through eighth grade teachers (refer to Table 1 following) in an urban, Northeastern public elementary school with a student population of approximately 800 with over 50% being Black or some other minority but with a sizable White percentage (with approximately 100 students in Special Education classes, but their teachers were not surveyed).. Several of the instructors from the upper grades were men, and approximately one third of the teachers are Afro-Americans.

Procedure

Because of time constraints and in an effort to gather information regarding teacher classroom control in a non-threatening manner, the questionnaires were placed in the teachers' school mailboxes. Answering of the questionnaire was voluntary, and the placing of the teacher's name on the form was made optional. The only procedural demands made were to list grade taught and placement of the completed form in the school Child Study Team (consisting of the School Social Worker, Psychologist, and Learning Consultant) mailbox located in the same room as the

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teachers' mailboxes. The person who distributed the questionnaire is a male, has been the School Psychologist for the past five schoolyears, and his identity was made known on the questionnaire (he signed each one by name, included his title, and made the hand written request as to where it was to be returned, as shown on Appendix A).

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that 25 teachers were invited to participate. It also gives a breakdown by grade, and shows that 80% actually responded.

TABLE 1
Teacher Distribution
by Grade and Response Rate

Grade Taught	Number of teachers assigned per grade	Number of teachers responding	Percentage of teachers responding
K	1	1	100%
1	3	3	100
2	3	2	67
3	3	3	100
4	2	1	50
5	4	2	50
6	3	2	67
7	3	3	100
8	3	3	100
Totals	25	20	80%

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Table 2 reveals the response pattern to the questionnaire.

Table 2

Questionnaire Response Pattern by Teacher Percentage

1. Posted written rules	2a. Verbally communicated rules	2b. No less of a need to state rules in Nov. than Sept.	2c. Responding to question of most often stated rules	3. Additional information given (open-ended question)
10%[1]	100%[2]	35%[3]	100%[4]	50%[5]

[1] One teacher each from the sixth and seventh grades; does not apply at all to kindergarten.

[2] One hundred per cent was expected here, this was merely a "noise" item in the test construction sense.

[3] Teachers of K, 1(2), 5, 7(2), and 8.

[4] One teacher only gave two rules and another four; otherwise, all gave three.

[5] Teachers by grade responding here were: K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7(2), and 8.

Only two upper elementary teachers of the twenty total teachers questioned posted written conduct rules in their classrooms. Every teacher has to voice rules. Seven teachers feel just as strong a need to emphasize rules for the third month of school as at the beginning of the school-year. Ninety five per cent could easily jot down three most commonly issued conduct rules. Ten instructors supplied additional pertinent data,

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while one seventh grade teacher attached a list of 22 mimeographed classroom rules which is distributed to the students at the beginning of school with a notation on the bottom inviting students to add to the list.

Table 3 indicates which rules were listed on the questionnaires with regard to frequency and the teacher's grade level who listed it.

TABLE 3
Classroom Conduct Rules Issued
by Frequency and Grade Level

Rule	Teacher by grade level listing rule on the questionnaire	Total
No talking in class (general) without permission	1 2 3 3 5 6 7 7 7 8 8	11
Stay in your seat (unless given permission to leave)	1 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 7 8 8	11
No chewing gum or eating in class	1 5 6 7 7 8	6
Pay attention/listen when somebody else is talking	K 1 2 2 3 6	6
Be courteous/Golden Rule	2 2 3 4 8	5
Raise your hand before speaking	K 4 5 7	4
No talking when teacher is speaking to somebody else	1 3	2
Keep your hands to yourself	3 8	2
Come equipped/prepared to class	6 8	2
Line up when told to do so	7	1
No hands up while teacher is talking	3	1
Walk quietly in the halls	1	1
Whisper when you speak	1	1
Sit up straight in your seat	3	1
Sharpen pencils when first entering classroom	6	1
Student is to communicate problems to teacher	8	1
Save questions until teacher is done with reading group	1	1
Clean up after yourself	5	1
Put toys away before taking another	K	1
Put chairs under tables when you get up	K	1
Total		60

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A perusal of Table 3 finds that teachers believed they issued more rules to have students remain seated and to be quiet than any other types. Getting the younger students to listen was a major problem, while for older pupils disciplining is required to have them refrain from chewing gum or eating in class. (It is highly noteworthy here that the fifth through eighth graders in this school have the last lunch period, from 12:33 to 1:14 PM. If the teachers were provided this sort of information they could arrange with the parents of the students who incessantly transgress the 'no eating in class rule' to insure that the students ate breakfast before coming to school. Also, if feasible and it often is not, the principal might be able to modify the lunch schedule.) Some of the others issued border on rules of decorum or socialization. One is strictly indigenous to Kindergarten - putting toys away - but most do apply to all grades. This sample of listed rules is too small to see further trends with any degree of confidence except that rules with a singular total (1) are probably just a "pet" area of concern to that teacher; e.g., "Whisper when you speak," from a first grader teacher.

At this point some of the narrative provided from the open-ended question should be examined. It was especially informative in that it provided specific overt and subtle methods for dealing with rule violations. A 7th grade teacher went over general rules in the beginning of the year for all classes, and then afterwards only the specifics for un-

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ruly classes or needy individuals. One grade 5 instructor discusses rules at year's start relating them to communities, laws, and living together harmoniously as a social studies lesson. A 6th grade instructor advises sticking to the rules so that a pattern of student taking advantage of teacher does not commence. A teacher of eighth graders warns against constantly repeating rules, and recommends disciplinary action for persistent undesirable conduct. A middle elementary level (fourth grade) teacher uses the more traditional approach: detention first and if that does not succeed, contact the parents. A second grade teacher utilizes "large words" for impact, private student "conferences" in the hallway to avoid snickering from classmates during individual reprimand, long stare eye contact with those caught in the act as surprise is believed important, and desk attached behavioral checklists as is used in many behavior modification classroom programs. On the very positive side, a teacher of quite young pupils (Kindergarten) uses peer clapping for acknowledgement of good work. A third grade teacher suggests a very creative technique to gain classroom order: a clapping sequence or the snapping of the fingers which the entire class must in turn repeat in the same sequence. Finally, one primary teacher (first grade) offers three axioms on classroom management: Be extremely strict at the beginning of the year, constantly and consistently enforce rules,

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and only give punishment to suit the crime. Good advice all, and whatever works for one, could for another.

DISCUSSION

The response rate for returned questionnaires in this study was very high at 80%. There were a number of factors operating here to produce this result: (i) They did not require much time to be completed. (ii) Returning them was convenient. (iii) Most of the teachers were female and a male was making the request. "Opposite sex helping behavior" is believed to be greater than "same sex helping behavior" (Bickman, 1974). And (iv), the "reciprocity principle" (Gouldner, 1960) - where people expect that those they do a favor for would be able to help them at a later time - is thought to be in effect. The resident school psychologist who is a male asked that the teaching staff which is predominantly female return the filled-in questionnaires if they chose to do so.

The rules listed showed that inappropriate student talking and seat leaving behavior were most problematic across all grades for these urban elementary school teachers. Getting the older students to refrain from chewing gum plus eating were problems at the higher elementary levels, while getting the younger pupils tc attend auditorily was stressed. Emphasizing courteousness (the Golden Rule) in the hope that it would

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generalize to other situations was virtually at the middle of rules issued distribution. Rules issued that were listed only once are thought to be idiosyncratic to that teacher.

Although posted written rules are definitely not applicable to Kindergarten and of questionable worth for low primary grades, it is surprising that only two teachers from the upper elementary levels posted them. Visual reminders of frequently transgressed rules could possibly reverse a bad situation. One extremely strict, very academically oriented sixth grade teacher from a different school than where this study was done had prominently posted the slogan: "Time will pass, will you?" above the classroom clock over the door. Humans are such visually oriented learners (Barthes, 1964) that greater use of posters, not just for classroom rules, should be utilized in schools.

The open-ended question from the questionnaire yielded specific, concrete, and very practical methods of dealing with conduct problems that occur in school (refer back to the end of the RESULTS section). Some were brilliantly creative while others were old, tried and true methods. Reading these could give teachers new ideas or just might be useful by serving as a reminder about methods that were forgotten.

Studying overall teaching style or teacher traits is not thought to be as useful for classroom control as specifically suggested techniques.

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Behavior modification tactics, although highly successful with very sophisticated designs for both individuals and whole classes, are not believed to be practical for teachers unless much additional expert support is provided.

A particularly successful principal once remarked that 'the problem many new teachers have is that they start out being too benevolent to get the youngsters to like them but they only take advantage of this and then the teacher finds it difficult to discipline them. Teachers must start out the schoolyear being very firm and then grant privileges when they are earned. The other way around just does not work, at least with our (urban) students.'

This research project was exploratory by intent and hopefully heuristic. Further study is necessary to discover which rules or techniques for classroom control are most efficacious. Specific experimental conditions could be set up comparing matched classes with the experimental group being given many emphasized classroom rules while the control group got few.

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APPENDIX A

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE ON "CLASSROOM CONDUCT RULES"

As part of a research project on "classroom conduct (or "management") rules" (as opposed to directions or instructions for lessons), you are being requested to provide some information if you choose to do so. It would be very much appreciated.

1. Do you now have any written conduct rules posted in your classroom?

   Circle one: Yes No

2. a. Are classroom rules communicated verbally?

   Yes No

2. b. Since this is now November, do you feel less of a need to state these rules than in September?

   Yes No

2. c. What rule or rules do you say most?

   1.
   2.
   3.

3. What other information about classroom conduct rules can you supply? For instance, subtle cues regarding conduct. (Use the back of the sheet if you need more space.)

Grade_____

School_____

Name (optional)_____

[Below was handwritten.]
Please place in Child Study Team mailbox ASAP. Thank you,

Scott Sigmon,
School Psychologist

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